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THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXIV.

JULY, 1882.

No. 3.

AMONG THE THLINKITS IN ALASKA. (Wood. C. 83)

WE set forth in April, 1877, from Portland, Oregon, in the steamer *California*, and steamed northward till we entered the Straits of Fuca. Our purpose was to climb Mount St. Elias, the highest peak in the world above the snow-line, to explore the Mount St. Elias alps, and to acquire information about the unknown districts lying nearest the coast, with a view to future explorations. For less is known today of Central Alaska than of Central Africa. From Cape Flattery to Fort Wrangell—nearly a thousand miles—the passage is entirely inland, excepting short runs across the Gulf of Georgia and Queen Charlotte's Sound. The shores are forest-covered mountains, between which the steamer passed as between the lofty banks of a river. One of these channels, Grenville Strait, is forty-five miles long, perfectly straight, and, in some places, only four hundred yards wide. Cliffs and snow-capped mountains wall it in. Avalanches have mowed bare swaths through the fir-trees from the summits to the water's edge, and the mountain lakes, lying a thousand or fifteen hundred feet above the spectator, pour their waters in foaming cataracts into the sea. Twelve hundred miles from the Columbia River bar we touched at Fort Wrangell, a filthy little town at the mouth of the Stickeen, where the miners from the gold-diggings up the Stickeen River spend the winter in squalor and drunkenness. A native village lies, between high tide and the forest, to the east of the town, along a sweep of the rocky beach. Behind the huts may be seen the graves of some Shamáns, or "medicine-men." Their functions, however, are more spiritual than medicinal, for these savages attribute death and disease to the workings of evil spirits. It is the part of the Shamán to exorcise the evil spirits or to call up the good. His remedies are

almost exclusively incantations and frenzied pantomime, accompanied with the wild hubbub of his rattles and drum. The Shamáns alone have tombs. All the other dead are burned on funeral pyres. At Wrangell we first saw the tall ancestral columns, which are carved from the trunks of huge trees, and sometimes are eighty and one hundred feet high. Their colossal, symbolic carvings represent the totemic genealogy of the cabin-dweller before whose door they stand. They serve the double purpose of frightening away evil spirits and satisfying family pride. A few sick or bankrupt miners were hanging about the American town. One ragamuffin, almost picturesque in tatters and dirt, was seated on the shoe-box steps of the "Miners' Palace Home and Rest-ent," playing an asthmatic accordion to an audience of half-naked Indians, wearing yellow headkerchiefs and cotton drawers.

After a few hours' stay at Wrangell, we sailed for Sitka by the outside passage around Cape Ommaney and Baranoff Island, as the inside passage is much longer.

As we entered the harbor of Sitka from the sea the general appearance of the place was tropical.* The snowy cone of Edgcumbe first appeared, then the sharp peak of Vostovia—a triangular patch of white against the sky. Everywhere below the snow-line the mountains were green with luxuriant growth. The harbor was protected against the sea by a curved line of reefs, on which grew firs and pines and cedars, with bare trunks and tufts of branches, making them look not unlike palms. The warm, moist atmosphere curtained all the middle distance with a film of

* Observations at Sitka during fourteen years give as mean summer temperature, 54.2 Fahr. Mean winter temperature, 31.9; average temperature, 42.80.

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blue, and, in the foreground, a fleet of very graceful canoes, filled with naked or half-naked Indians, completed the illusion. A line of surf seemed to bar every approach to the town, but suddenly a narrow channel opened. The ship swung sharply to the right and glided into a long, narrow harbor. The Indian village is built upon the beach, and at evening it was covered by the shadow of the adjoining forest. The green spire on the belfry of the Greek church reached up above everything except the former Russian governor's "castle," a huge log structure perched upon a pinnacle of rock near the sea. The church on the lower ground was surrounded by the rambling, dilapidated houses and hovels of the Russian inhabitants, who then numbered about four hundred, their neighbors being two hundred mixed whites and about twelve hundred Sitka Indians. Sitka was abandoned as a military station shortly after our arrival, since which time several efforts have been made to induce Congress to organize some sort of government there.

When we landed at Sitka we forced our way through a crowd of Indians, Russians, half-breeds, Jews, and soldiers, to whom this monthly arrival is life itself, and went directly to the trading-store and post-office. Mr. C. H. Taylor, of Chicago, who supported the expedition, had written to engage Phillips's fur-trading schooner to take us to Yakutat, where we were to begin our exploration. This schooner was the only craft available for rough work in the ice-drifts, so it was with much anxiety that we asked:

"Where is your schooner?"

"Gone to Behring's Bay for a load of furs," was the disappointing answer.

After fruitless efforts to obtain something better, we decided to risk ourselves in one of the

large Indian canoes. The Alaskans, having a superfluity of time on their hands, devote long periods to the most trifling transactions, and, in important bargains, it takes days, and sometimes weeks, to reach an agreement. We found them grasping, shrewd, and unscrupulous.

It was April 16th when we first asked for a large war canoe, or *yahk* (a word which would seem to be related to the yacht of the Germanic tongue), with crew. We negotiated with several of the chiefs, sub-chiefs, and principal men who owned the canoes and slaves to man them. But after wearing ourselves out chaffering with them, we found we could save time by taking the experienced Phillips's advice to "let'm alone." By and by, these aboriginal land-sharks began to offer terms. The winter and spring drizzle set in, and we joined the group of loungers around the trader's stove. We visited "Sitka Jack," an arrant old scoundrel, but one of the wealthiest men of the Sitka tribe. Of course his house stood among the largest, at the fashionable end of the town. These houses were built of planks, three or four inches thick, each one having been hewed from a log, with an adze formed by lashing a metal blade to the short prong of a forked stick. In constructing the native cabin, the planks are set on edge and so nicely fitted that they need no chinking. The shape of the house is square; a bark roof is laid on, with a central aperture for chimney. The door is a circular opening about two feet in diameter. It is closed with a sheet of bark or a bear-skin or seal-skin. On arriving at Sitka Jack's hut we crawled through the door, and found ourselves in the presence of Jack's wives, children, and slaves, who were lounging on robes and blankets laid on a board flooring which extended along



THLINKIT COVERED BASKET AND SPOON. (CHILKÁHT KWÁHN.)

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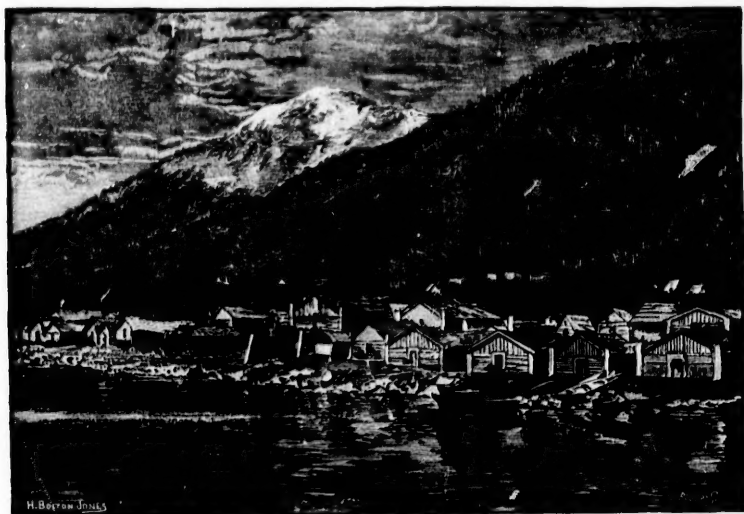


GOING FISHING.

each side of the room. A dirt floor about seven feet square was left in the center, and on this the fire burned and the pot of halibut boiled merrily. Our arrival was hailed with stolid indifference. The family circle reclined and squatted as usual, and went on with the apparently enjoyable occupation of scooping up handfuls of raw herring-roe, which they munched with great gusto. Sitka Jack was absent on a trading expedition to the Chilkáht kwáhn or tribe. One of his brothers-in-law was chief of this tribe, and being a one-eyed despot of sanguinary principles not only held his tribe under absolute control, but inspired his relatives and connections with wholesome awe. His sister, Mrs. "Sitka Jack," was, therefore, a person of great consequence, and her influence surpassed even the usual wonderful authority of the Alaskan women. Evidently she was the head of the house, and as such she received us haughtily. She weighed at least two hundred pounds. She gave us her terms, pointed coldly at the slaves she would send with us, and told us she was the sister of the terrible Chilkáht chief. As we still hesitated, she threw her weight into the scale, and said she would go with us and protect us. We could not get one of the great canoes

holding from sixty to eighty warriors, but finally closed a bargain with Tah-ah-nah-klékh for his canoe, of about four tons burden. He was to act as pilot and steersman. We hired Nah-sach, Klen, and Jack as crew. Jack, our interpreter, was a Sitka Indian who had a smattering of mongrel Russian and English. Myers went with us as prospector and miner.

We had accumulated a cargo that looked fully twice the size of the canoe, which, like all of her kind, was as buoyant as a bladder, as graceful as a gull, and very capacious, so that by skillful stowage we loaded in the entire cargo and left room for ourselves; that is, we could swing our paddles, but we could not change our seats. Jack, or Sam as we had newly named him, was fond of "Hoo-chinoo." This is a native distilled liquor, colorless and vilely odorous. The stills are large tin oil-cans, and the coils are giant kelp. The Sitkans never set forth on an expedition of unusual importance without first getting beastly drunk. Sam had evidently gauged the importance of this expedition as immense. We loaded him in as cargo, and waited for the last man, Myers, who presently appeared, dragging at the end of a rope a half-grown black dog. Myers took his place, his canine friend was put



THE INDIAN VILLAGE AT SITKA.

in the bow, and amid the cheers of idle Sitka we paddled rapidly toward the north. The dog gazed wistfully at the retreating crowd, then suddenly sprang into the water and swam ashore.

For a time we were in mortal terror, lest we should capsize the shell by our awkwardness; an anxiety on our part that was epitomized, at our first landing, in Myers's fervent exclamation:



DOMESTIC BOWL FOR SEAL-OIL. (HOONAH KWÄHN.)

"Thank Heaven, I kin shift my foot!"

One drowsy evening we saw the peak of Edgumbe for the last time. The great

truncated cone caught the hues of the sunset, and we could note the gloom gathering deeper and deeper in the hollow of the crater. Our Indians were stolidly smoking the tobacco we had given them, and were resting after the labors of the day with bovine contentment. Tah-ah-nah-klékh related to us the Thlinkit legend of Edgumbe:

"A long time ago the earth sank beneath the water, and the water rose and covered the highest places so that no man could live. It rained so hard that it was as if the sea fell from the sky. All was black, and it became so dark that no man knew another. Then a few people ran here and there and made a raft of cedar logs, but nothing could stand against the white waves, and the raft was broken in two.

"On one part floated the ancestors of the Thlinkits, on the other the parents of all other nations. The waters tore them apart, and they never saw each other again. Now their children are all different, and do not understand each other. In the black tempest Chethl was torn from his sister Ah-gish-ahn-akhon ['The woman-who-supports-the-earth']. Chethl [symbolized in the osprey] called aloud to her, 'You will never see me again, but you will hear my voice forever!' Then he became an enormous bird, and flew to south-west till no eye could follow him. Ah-gish-ahn-akhon climbed above the waters and reached the summit of Edgumbe. The mountain

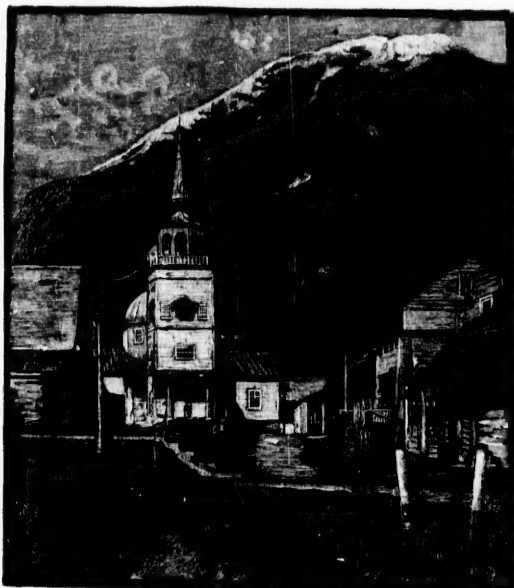
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opened and received her into the bosom of the earth. That hole [the crater] is where she went down. Ever since that time she has held the earth above the water. The earth is shaped like the back of a turtle and rests on a pillar; Ah-gish-ahn-akhon holds the pillar. Evil spirits that wish to destroy mankind seek to overthrow her or drive her away. The terrible battles are long and fierce in the lower darkness. Often the pillar rocks and

We passed a succession of evergreen islands with steep, rocky shores, and in the distance we could see the jagged alps of the main-land. The trees were principally fir, hemlock, and cedar. The evergreen underbrush was so dense and so matted with ferns and moss as to be almost impenetrable. The accumulation of moss was frequently ten or fifteen feet deep. Peat-bogs and coal-fields were common features of the islands, but the



THE MAIN STREET OF SITKA.

sways in the struggle, and the earth trembles and seems like to fall, but Ah-gish-ahn-akhon is good and strong, so the earth is safe. Chethl lives in the bird Kunna-káht-eth. His nest is in the top of the mountain, in the hole through which his sister disappeared.

"He carries whales in his claws to this cyrie, and there devours them. He swoops from his hiding-place and rides on the edge of the coming storm. The roaring of the tempest is his voice calling to his sister. He claps his wings in the peals of thunder, and its rumbling is the rustling of his pinions. The lightning is the flashing of his eyes."*

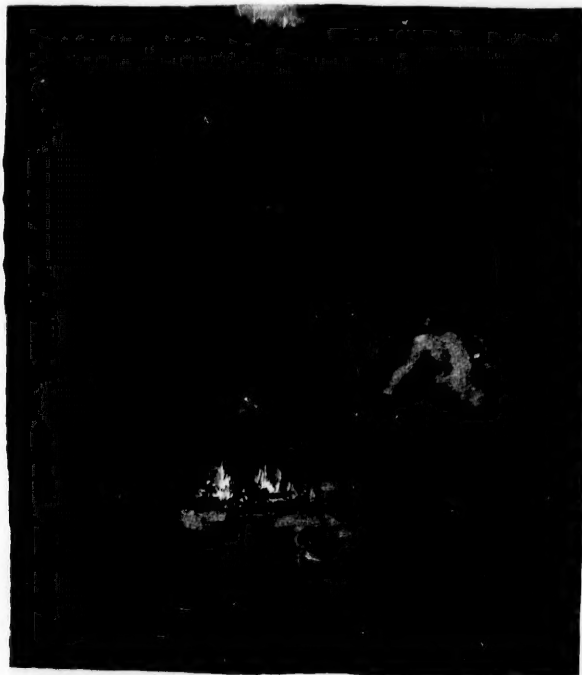
* Bishop Veniaminoff, Wrangell, and Dall have given versions of this legend.

coal was found to be sulphurous and bituminous. Clams were abundant and good. The smallest, when opened, were about the size of an orange. The largest shells were used as soup-plates by the natives. The waters of the archipelago at all seasons are alive with halibut. They are caught with a peculiar hook, fastened to a thick line made of twisted cedar-root fiber. Our bill of fare in Alaska included clams, mussels, herring, herring-roe, codfish, salmon, porpoise, seal, ducks, geese, and halibut—eternally halibut. Venison and wild goat and bear's flesh were to be had only occasionally, and the craving for good warm-blooded meats was incessant with us whites. Another intense craving was for sweets. We devoured our

supply of sugar, and when it was exhausted we consumed much seal-oil, and chewed the sweet inner bark of a species of cedar, of which bark the Indians dry great quantities for the winter.

On the 27th we sighted the mouth of the Chilkáht. Professor Davidson of the Coast Survey has been up this river a little beyond the upper village. The two villages are governed by the Chilkáht chief before alluded to as "Sitka Jack's" brother-in-law. He is a despot and

mostly captives from the tribes of the interior, or from hostile coast tribes. So little distinction is made between the bond and the free that at first a stranger finds it difficult to detect the slaves. They sit around the fire and eat from the same dish with their owners, who joke with them, and place them on a footing of perfect social equality. But the slaves hew the wood and carry the water and paddle the canoe. They cannot marry with-



AN ALASKAN INTERIOR.

does not encourage explorations of his river, though recently he has become so envious of the gold mines on the Stickeen, that it is said he will help gold prospectors to ascend his river. This one-eyed chief is very savage and vindictive, but as he holds a monopoly of the fur trade up and down his river he is very wealthy and influential, and can be of great assistance to any expedition.* He owns many slaves,

out the consent of their master, and they are unpleasantly liable to be offered as sacrifices on their master's grave.

From Chatham Strait we paddled against head winds into Cross Sound. In a sudden turn the whole vast sound opened to us, and the Mount St. Elias alps appeared like a shadowy host of snowy domes and pinnacles. Chief among them were the twin peaks Fairweather and Crillon. About this time we met a canoe-load of Hoonáhs, who had come ninety miles to dig their spring potatoes. On a sunny slope, sheltered by surrounding forests

* A good plan of exploration would be by two parties coöperating: one to go up the Yukon, the other up the Chilkáht, to meet at a depot of supply previously located on the upper Yukon.

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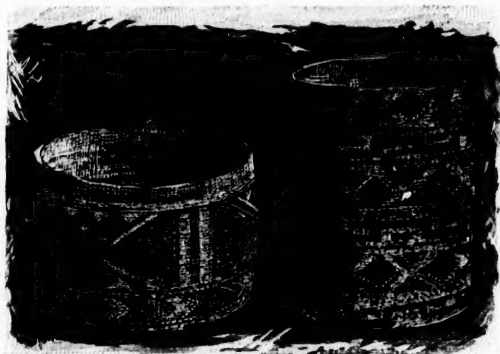


THLINKIT WAR CANOE. (HAIDÁH KWÁHN.)

and sentinel peaks, these people had long ago planted some potatoes procured from the Russians at Sitka, and every year they come to dig last year's crop, and sow the ground for the following spring. The tubers were about the size of large marbles. In the gardens of Sitka are grown excellent potatoes, beets, turnips, radishes, lettuce, cabbage, and such hardy vegetables. The soil is not suitable for cereals, neither is the season long enough.

Near Cape Spencer we camped on a little

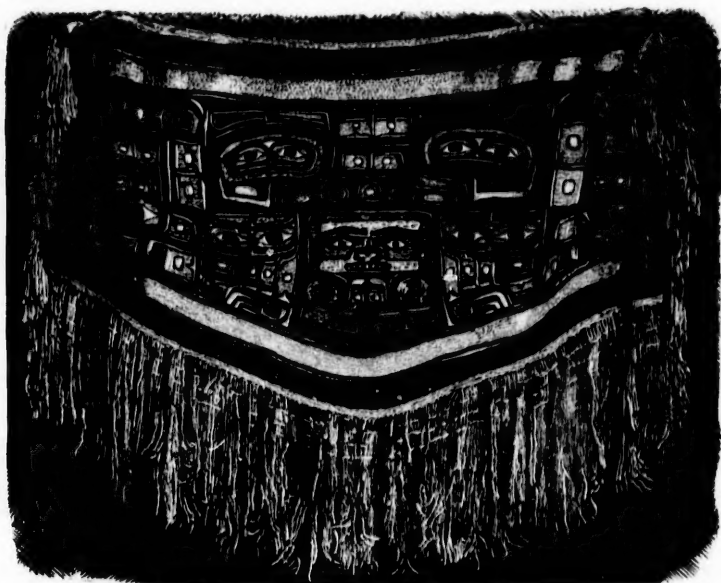
island, where 'Tsa-tate, a young man of the Hoonáh kwáhn, had his summer hut. Three families lived here with 'Tsa-tate; and, though he was much younger than the other men of the family, he was the head of his clan. 'Tsa-tate's cabin was like all the other wooden huts we had seen. The cross poles and rafters were hung with fish and snow-shoes and nets. The sides were covered with traps, bows, spears, paddles, and skins of bear, sable, and silver-fox. The women sat around the fire, weaving baskets of different shapes and colors



THLINKIT BASKET WORK. (HOONÁH KWÁHN.)

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THLINKIT CHIEF'S CLOAK. (CHILKÁHT KWÁHS.)

from the fiber of a long, fine root, which they soaked in water and split into threads. One old woman was chewing the seams of a pair



WOMAN'S WOODEN COMB. (CHILKÁHT.)

of seal-skin boots so as to soften them, and another was pounding some tobacco leaves into snuff. A man with a fiery red head was carving a pipe in which to smoke the tobacco we had given him, and a sick baby, tenderly watched by its mother, lay in a cor-

ner, with its mouth and nostrils stuffed full of some chewed-up weed. As darkness came on and the halibut fishermen returned from the sea, we all gathered about the central fire in Tsa-tate's hut, and Mrs. Tsa-tate lighted the pitch-wood candles, and with down and resin dressed an ugly gash in the sole of her husband's foot. The children slept or poked the fire with an immunity from scolding that would have cheered the heart of every civilized five-year-old. A young girl sat demurely in a corner. Until they are of marriageable age, and entitled to wear the silver ornament through the lower lip, the maidens are carefully watched by the elder women of the family. An old woman stirred and skimmed the boiling pot of porpoise flesh. Tsa-tate, reclining comfortably on a divan of bear-skins, answered our questions and repeated tribal legends. He pointed to his son, a boy about five years old, who, he said, would be his successor, as head of the clan. It was difficult to ascertain the exact law of succession among the Thlinkits, but the chiefship seems to follow the direct line, though, as in all other savage nations, this is scarcely a rule, for the lineal heir may be set aside in favor of a more acceptable man. In the inheritance of personal property the collateral is preferred

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to the lineal relationship. The wives, or more properly the widows, being personal property, pass to the collateral next of kin of their husband's totem, for the marriage of two people of the same totem is considered a kind of incest. The widow, in any event, takes with her such possessions as have always been peculiarly her own. She also takes her own infant children; naturally, then, she would take to her new husband the children's inheritance, which may account for the habit of regarding the male collaterally next of kin as proper heir. If there be no male survivor competent to receive the widow, or if he purchases freedom with goods, she then passes into the open matrimonial market, with her pecuniary attractions. Sometimes the heir rebels and refuses to accept his former sister-in-law, cousin, aunt, or whatever she may be. Then her totemic or family relatives wage war on the insulter and such of his totem as he can rally around him, the object being either to enforce her right or extort a proper recompense. Among the Asónques, further to the north and west, I saw a young fellow of about eighteen years of age who had just fallen heir to his uncle's widow. As I looked upon her mummy-like proportions I thought that here was reasonable cause for war. Sometimes a husband already liberally provided for will come into a misfortune in the shape of one or more widows. The only escape is by purchasing freedom. In fact, there seems to be no hurt to a Thlinkit's honor that money or goods will not heal. The scorning of a widow, the betrayal of a maiden, and murder, all demand blood or pecuniary compensation. If in a feud all negotiations fail, and Kanúkh (symbolized in the wolf), the God of War, be unpropitious, and send private war, then the principal antagonists, with their totemic adherents, don their helmets and coats of paint, and stand facing each other in two lines, each



SHAMÁN'S DRUMSTICK AND WAR KNIVES. 1. CHILKÁHT.
2. HOONÁH KWÁHN.

line holding to a rope with the left hand, and wielding heavy knives with the right. They advance, and hack and hew, with more yells than bloodshed, until one side or the other cries the Thlinkit for *peccavi*. In this duel, any warrior violates the code who lets go the rope with the left hand, unless he be wounded, or torn from it; when he has let go, he is then out of the fight and must retire. If the strife be inter-tribal, or public war, the plan of combat is surprise and sudden capture. The villages, from necessity as well as from choice, are placed always at the edge of high tide. The forces of the aggressive tribe embark in a fleet of war canoes, and by a swift and stealthy voyage strike the village from the sea and endeavor to take it by storm. If they are resisted they generally retire at once. The Chilkáht kwáhn came down suddenly upon the main village of the Sitka kwáhn while I was near by, but succeeded in getting possession of only half the houses, so the opposing forces divided the village between them and kept up a lively but rather harmless combat for three days, at the end of which the invaders were bought off with some loads of furs. A member of the



HALIBUT HOOK. (HOONÁH KWÁHN.)



SHAMAN'S RATTLE. (HOONÁH KWÁHN.)

Sitka kwáhn had murdered his Chilkáht squaw in a fit of passion, and this was the cause of the conflict. The goods paid over as recompense went principally to the relatives of the murdered woman. In these tribal conflicts the captured are enslaved, the dead are scalped, and all property taken is held as booty. Hostages and participants in rope duels do not take food from the right hand for several days, because, figuratively (and literally), it is unclean. A head powdered with down is a sign of truce.

We were now within five days' journey of Yakutat, which is near Icy Bay, at which place one of the Mount St. Elias glaciers

ends in the sea. Threats and bribes were alike useless. Pay or no pay, our crew would not put to sea. Tah-ah-nah-klek pointed to the mountain, and said:

"One mountain is as good as another. There is a very big one. Go climb that if you want to."

Thus perished our hope of climbing Mount St. Elias. We turned our course directly to the main-land, about thirty miles away, and landed a little below Cape Spencer. A sea-wind filled the coast-waters with icebergs, and we had great difficulty in picking our way through them. I noticed that, when journeying through the floating ice in good weather, our Indians would carefully avoid striking pieces of ice, lest they should offend the Ice Spirit. But when the Ice Spirit beset us with peril, they did not hesitate to retaliate by banging his subjects. After picking our way through the ice for three days, we came upon a small temporary camp of Hoonáhs, who were seal-hunting. We found little camps of a family or two scattered along both shores. One of the largest glaciers from Fairweather comes into the bay, and thus keeps its waters filled with the largest icebergs, even in the summer season, for which reason the bay is a favorite place for seal-hunting. The seal is the natives' meat, drink (the oil is like melted butter), and clothing. I went seal-hunting to learn the art, which requires care and patience. The hunter, whether on an ice floe or in a canoe, never moves when the seal is aroused. When the animal is asleep, or has dived, the hunter darts forward. The spear has a barbed detachable head, fastened to the shaft by a plaited line made from sinew. The line has attached to it a marking buoy, which is merely an inflated seal's bladder. The young seals are the victims of the Thlinkit boys, who kill them with bow and arrow. These seal-hunters used a little moss and seal-oil and some driftwood for fuel. In the morning we arose late, and found that our friends of the night before had

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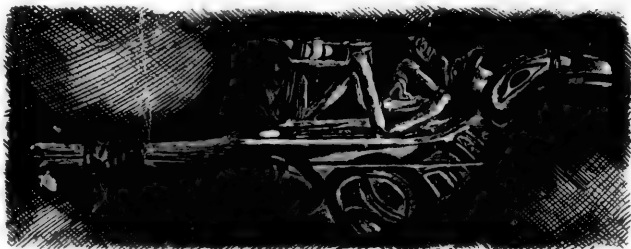
silently stolen away, taking with them much of our firewood.

Mr. Taylor decided to return home, and we accompanied him to Sitka. There I reëngaged Sam and Myers, and, obtaining a new crew, returned at once to a bay about twenty miles south-east of Mount Fairweather. My purpose was to explore the bay, cross the coast range, and strike the upper waters of Chilkáht. On the shores of the bay we found hospitality with a band of Hoonáhs. Leaving the crew with our large canoe under the charge of Myers at this place, I took a smaller one and went with Cocheen, the chief of the band, north-westerly up the bay. After about forty miles' travel we came to a small village of Asonques. They received us with great hospitality, and as our canoe had been too small to carry any shelter, the head man gave me a bed in his own cabin. He had a great many wives, who busied themselves making me comfortable. The buckskin reinforcement of my riding trowsers excited childish wonder. I drew pictures of horses and men separate, and then of men mounted on horses. Their astonishment over the wonderful animal was greater than their delight at comprehending the utility of the trowsers. The Alaskan women are childish and pleasant, yet quick-witted and capable of heartless vindictiveness. Their authority in all matters is unquestioned. No bargain is made, no expedition set on foot, without first consulting the women. Their veto is never disregarded. I bought a silver-fox skin from Tsa-tate, but his wife made him return the articles of trade and recover the skin. In the same way I was perpetually being annoyed by having to undo bargains because "his wife said *ekkh*," that is, "no." I hired a fellow to take me about thirty miles in his canoe, when my own crew was tired. He agreed. I paid him the tobacco, and we were about to start when his wife came to the beach and stopped him. He quietly unloaded the canoe and handed me back the



THLINKIT WOMAN. (NTKA KWÁHN.)

tobacco. The whole people are curious in the matter of trade. I was never sure that I had done with a bargain, for they claimed and exercised the right to undo a contract at any time, provided they could return the consideration received. This is their code among themselves. For example: I met at the mouth of the Chilkáht a native trader who had been to Fort Simpson, about six hundred miles away, and failing to get as much as he gave in the interior of Alaska for the skins, was now returning to the interior to find the first vender and revoke the whole transaction. Among themselves their currency is a species of wampum, worth about twenty dollars a string, beaver-skins worth about a dollar a skin, and sable or marten worth about two dollars a skin. From the whites they get blankets worth four dollars apiece, and silver dollars; gold they will not touch (except around Sitka and Wrangell), but they accept copper and silver. They are a laughing, good-natured people,



SHAMÁN'S RATTLE. (ASÓNQUE KWÁHN.)



BONE STAKES FOR MARTEN TRAP. (INTERIOR OF ALASKA.)

ordinarily very quiet. Even their large meetings are subdued and orderly. They are undemonstrative. The mothers do not fondle nor play with their children much, but a stranger can win their hearts by kindness to their little ones. They consider corporeal punishment a disgrace, and I did not see a child struck during the time I was among them. A rebuke, a sharp tone, or exclusion from the cabin seemed to be the only punishments. Even the dogs are curiously exempt from punishment and abuse, and a more wolfish, starved, mangy lot of curs it would be hard to find. Good bear-dogs they will not sell at any price. With all their gentleness of voice and manner, and their absolute respect for the rights of the smallest and youngest of the family, their love and affection seemed of the coolest sort. Etiquette required only about forty days of ostensible mourning. The loss of children seemed to cause the greatest grief. They have a curious habit of blacking the face with a mixture of seal-oil and lamp-black, or burnt pitch, but I believe this custom, whatever its origin, is now merely a kind of toilet, to be used according to the whim of the individual.

From this Asónque village I went, with a party of mountain goat-hunters, up into the Mount St. Elias alps back of Mount Fairweather—that is, to the north-east of that mountain. For this trip our party made elaborate preparations. We donned belted shirts made of

squirrel skins, fur head-dresses (generally conical), seal-skin booties fitting very closely, and laced half-way to the knee. We carried spears for alpenstocks, bows and arrows, raw-hide ropes, and one or two old Hudson Bay rifles. The climbing was very laborious work. The mountains, where not covered with ice or snow, were either of a crumbling schistose character or ice-worn limestone, and sometimes granite. The sides were terribly rugged; some of the face walls were about eight hundred feet sheer, with a foot slope of shell-rock or *débris* of two hundred or three hundred feet more. Ptarmigan were seen on the lower levels where the ground was bare, but I saw nothing on which they could feed. The goats kept well up toward the summit, amid the snow-fields, and fed on the grass which sprouted along the edges of melting drifts. They were the wariest, keenest animals I ever hunted. The animal is like a large white goat, with long, coarse hair and a heavy coat of silky underfleece. The horns, out of which the natives carve spoons, are short, sharp, and black.

After crossing this coast range the country seemed much the same—rugged, bleak, and impassable. The Indians with me, so far as I could understand them, said it was an exceedingly rough country all the way over, and that the Chilkáht River had its rise among just such alps as those around us, only it was warmer in the Chilkáht mountains, and there was more grass and plenty of wild goats,



THLINKIT TRAVELING CHEST.

sheep, and bears. We found a bear that, so far as I know, is peculiar to this country. It is a beautiful bluish under color, with the tips of the long hairs silvery white. The traders call it "St. Elias's silver bear." The skins are not common.

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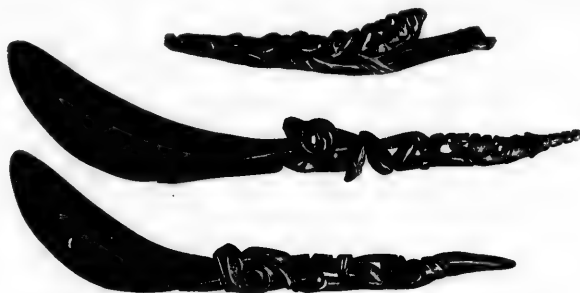
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Being unable to go further overland I returned to the Asónque camp. There we fitted ice-guards to a small canoe, and with ice-hooks pulled our way through, and carried our canoe over the floes and among the icebergs, to the extreme limit of so-called open water in that direction. The ice-guards were merely wooden false sides hung to a false prow. From this point, also, I found the interior impenetrable, and went to a temporary

Here he paused again, picked up the corner of his squirrel robe and raised it with a sweeping forward gesture, which he maintained till his words had produced their full effect, when the sing-song intonation would begin again.

Coon-nah-nah-thklé, for that was his name, showed me his sorcerer's kit. There was an immense drum of stretched seal-skin or goat-skin, made to accompany him in his incantations, and to terrify the wicked spirits preying



THLINKIT ANCESTRAL SPOONS. (FROM HORNS OF MOUNTAIN GOAT. HOONÁH KWÁHN.)

camp of seal and goat hunters, who were camped on a ledge of rocks above the crunching and grinding icebergs. The head man of this camp was a young fellow of about thirty, who was both Shamán ("medicine-man") and hereditary chief. He was the most thoughtful and entertaining Thlinkit I had met. He told me that within his own lifetime this place where we now were had been solid ice. He would listen with breathless attention whenever I spoke, and then reply in low, musical intonations, almost like chanting. His narration of the traditions of his people was pathetic in its solemn earnestness. He said:

"You are the only white man that has ever been here, but I have heard of your people. Before I was born—a long time ago—a ship came to the mouth of this bay, and gave the Thlinkits iron to make knives like this one. Before that the Thlinkits made knives from copper or from stone, like this."

Then he would pause, fix his eyes on me, and hold up the knife. When he saw I had absorbed his words, he would give a graceful wave of the hand and continue:

"Then the Thlinkits had many furs,—foxes, and bear, and sable,—all the people were warm, all were happy, and lived as Yéhl had set them to live [or after Yéhl's example, I don't know which]. There was plenty to eat, and plenty to wear. Now, sometimes we are hungry and wear ragged robes."

upon the life of the sick person. The drum had formerly belonged to a celebrated Shamán, and his spirit was either in the drum itself or had passed into the possessor of the drum, I could not determine which. I found it to be a common belief that anything that had belonged to a dead wizard possessed some inherent virtue. For this reason it was almost impossible to secure Shamán instruments. These Shamáns claim to be able to see the "life" or soul leaving the body or being dragged from it by spirits, and it is their business to seize the soul with the mouth and breathe or force it back into the body. The dress they wear depends upon what malign spirits they determine are at work. I only saw one Shamán exorcising, and I do not believe he would have continued had he known I was observing him. He kneaded, pounded, yelled, chanted, frothed, swayed to and fro, played tunes all up and down the suffering patient, blew in his mouth and nostrils, and literally worried the life out of him. In general practice the Shamán continues this performance till the wretched patient declares he is better or well. If he cures, the Shamán gets large pay. If he kills, he restores the goods he has previously received on account. If any one who is not a regular Shamán does anything for a patient who dies, the self-constituted doctor is held responsible, and must pay forfeit in life or goods. If the patient is obdurate and will not declare



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BODY OF CHIEF "SHAKES" LYING IN STATE, PREPARATORY TO CREMATION.

that the spirits have left him, the Shamán makes that statement for him. The hair is generally worn long by the Alaskan women; always short by the men, except the Shamáns, who never cut or comb the hair, nor are the matted locks benefited any by the habit of powdering and greasing for occasions of ceremony. The hair is kept tied up, except when the Shamán is exercising his peculiar functions. Then it is shaken out in long, snaky ropes, which dance over the shoulders. Some take these ropes of hair and stick them all over with flat scales of pitch, increasing thereby the Medusa-like appearance of the head. I made for myself a fair reputation for sorcery while in Coon-nah-nah-thklé's camp by a judicious use of my repeating-rifle and revolver. The chief and I shot at a mark, and I am afraid he was the better shot. He gave me a little amulet (whale totem), which he said would bring me good luck if I would hang it on my rifle. Then he took the weapon and passed his hands over it, and blew on it, which he said would prevent its ever hurting him.

The spirits of the Thlinkit mythology are classified as Ki-yékh, spirits of the air; Tah-ki-yékh, spirits of the earth; Te-ki-yékh, spirits of the water; and Yékh, subordinate or minor spirits. The spirits of those killed in war become Ki-yékh, and the aurora is the flashing of their lights when they are dancing their

war dances. Hence, an auroral display is a sign of war. The chief deity of the Thlinkits, the Bramah, the Creator, is Yehl. One would suppose that he would be the deity of the Tinneh, or interior Indians. Yet among the Thlinkits the raven is held peculiarly sacred for his sake, and the early writers (Veniaminoff and Wrangell) declare the raven to be a foul and ill-omened bird among the Tinneh. Yehl is symbolized in the raven for the reason that one of his chief exploits, the bringing of fresh water to the Thlinkits, was done under the guise of a raven. The sum of Thlinkit philosophy is, "Live as Yehl lived." Their great totem is Yehl's totem or the raven totem, the raven being the symbol. Another scarcely inferior totem is the Kanúkh (wolf), the wolf being the symbol. The third (and, so far as I know, the last) totem is Tset'kh (the whale). Who Tset'kh was before he was a whale and what he did I could not learn.

Their totemic system is the most curious one that ever came to my notice. The totemic relationship is stronger than that of blood. The child follows the totem of the mother, and in family quarrels the opponents must array themselves with their totems; hence, half-brothers are often called on to fight each other. I used to be surprised at having my vagabonds tell me perfect strangers were their "brothers" or "sisters," until I found it meant brother or sister

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VOL. X



in the totem. The Kanúkh (wolf) totem is the warrior caste. Men of this caste are the soldiers of the whole people, and are led in war only by chiefs of their own caste. Kanúkh is either the older brother of Yehl or an older deity—I don't know which. He is now the god of war and patron saint of the "wolves," but the myths tell of a celebrated encounter between him and Yehl. It is difficult to arrive at the religion of the Thlinkits from the stories of these deities. In my short visit I certainly could not, and Veniaminoff, who lived among them, has left little information on the subject.

A very wise old raven was pointed out to me as the embodied spirit of a defunct Shamán. Suicides are very frequent, because the tired person wishes to enter upon a happier existence; this and the superstition as to the aurora points to a belief in a spirit life. Then again bodies are cremated (except Shamáns), and whatever may have been the origin of the pyre, the reason given now is that the spirit may not be cold on the journey to the Spirit Land. A Thlinkit, in answer to my questionings, replied:

"Doctors wont burn."

"But why don't you try?" I persisted.

"Because we know they will not burn."

I once saw a body ready for the funeral pyre. It was lying behind the cabin in a crouching attitude, with a native blanket from the wool of mountain goats thrown over it, and its robes and possessions near by. A hole had been cut through the rear wall of the cabin, for if the corpse had been carried through the entrance, it would have left the dread mystery of death upon the threshold, and the living could not enter. The Shamán attends to the burning. One day a little boy of the Sitká Kwáhn pointed out to me as a Shamán. He wore the unouched long hair. I asked how they knew so soon that he was to be a Shamán.

"Oh," they answered, "he was alive a long time ago as a Shamán." At the proper time, this boy must take his degree in the college of Shamánism by fasting in solitude in the wilderness. No one must approach him, and his food must be the roots of the earth. When he has become sufficiently spiritualized, the Great Shamán will send to him the otter, to impart the secrets of his order. The novice will meet the animal. They will salute three times. He will fall upon the otter and tear out its tongue and take off its skin. Then in a frenzy he will rush back to his tribe and madly bite whatever comes in his way. These bites are often dangerous, but are sought for as wounds of honor. This frenzy fit among the Haidáhs is called be-

coming "Taamish." If the otter is not forthcoming in due time there are various artifices to compel his presence, such as getting the tooth or finger of a dead Shamán and holding it in the mouth. After the Nawloks, or evil spirits, have thus wrestled with him, the Shamán ever after has his own attendant retinue of Nawloks and Yekhs, or even of higher spirits, whom he summons to his aid. In supernatural matters, therefore, his word is law.

At Coon-nah-nah-thklé's, I found the people using stone-axes, knives, and other implements, some of which I brought away with me. They were made of hypo-chlorite and slate, tempered in oil. The children there were greatly frightened at me, and would not let me approach them. On my return I encountered another Shamán, and purchased from him a finely carved medicine rattle. But a skinny hag snatched it from my hand, just as I had concluded the bargain, and compelled the "Doctor" to return me my tobacco. She said the rattle had been the favorite one of her dead husband, a Shamán, who had left her and his rattles to this nephew, the "Doctor," who certainly did not seem too happy over it. By judicious coaxing and tobacco I succeeded in pacifying her, and renewed my trade with the nephew. The rattle is carved with crane's, owl's, and raven's heads, and has queer long-tongued demons turning back somersaults over it.

From Cocheen's I turned southward and homeward. I had applied for a year's leave with the purpose of exploring the interior of Alaska, and now was anxious to return to Sitka for the reply. In Chatham Strait, near Cross Sound, the old head chief of the Hoonáhs, came and begged me to go to his island to doctor his boy who was very sick. I went but was loath to do any doctoring; for the Thlinkit custom of killing the doctor in case his patient dies, is discouraging to a beginner. The boy was feverish and had a complication of troubles, so I gave him hot-water baths followed with a seidlitz powder. The effervescing of the powder put me at once at the head of the Shamáns. During my stay I built up an extensive practice. I made for the chief some camphorated soap liniment. Eye troubles are common among the Thlinkits, and are due to the glitter of snow and ice and the irritation caused by the smoke in the huts. One feeble old man to whom I had ministered was surely dying, and I was anxious to be off before that event. I visited all my patients preparatory to departing. I gave to some dried onions stewed in sugar, to others cod-liver oil, and diluted alcohol to the feeble old man to keep him up until I could get away. From the father

of the sick boy, then nearly well, I took a fee of some finely carved spoons made from horns of the mountain goat.

At this camp I found traces of a custom which prevails to some extent in Central Africa and is said to obtain throughout the interior of Alaska. When a stranger of rank visits a chief, the latter presents his guest with a wife from among the women of his household. In morals the Alaskans are much inferior to most Indian tribes of the plains. Avarice is their ruling passion. They are the most knavish and cunning of traders. Theft, if successful, brings no disgrace. The detected thief is laughed at and ridiculed. I saw old Cocheen look with fond admiration on Kastase-Kúch, his son, when the latter drew from under his robe some articles he had purloined from the village where we had lodged for the night. Their gratitude seemed small and they have no expression for "I thank you." Flaws in gifts were always carefully examined and critically pointed out to the giver. An Alaskan who shot at some decoy ducks near Sitka, went to the owner of the decoys and demanded the return of his wasted ammunition. Two Alaskans were driven to sea in a canoe. A schooner picked them up, but would not or could not take their canoe as it was still blowing a gale. The rescued demanded payment for the lost craft. Another fellow came to the doctor of the post at Sitka and begged for medicine for his brother and then asked the doctor to pay him for carrying it to the brother. I lent Tah-ah-nah-klékh a goat-skin robe of mine and at the end of our voyage asked him to clean it. He did so and demanded full payment. We did not lose much by theft, because our crew knew very well the value would be deducted from their wages. Thlinkit virtues are hospitality, good-nature, peaceableness, filial obedience, and, after their own code, a respect for solemn contracts or engagements. Even when very angry they only sulk. They are demonstrative only in the expression of surprise. My host, the old Hoonáh chief, was disinterested kindness itself. At his bountiful board I had a seat between his youngest and prettiest wives. They prepared seal-flipper for me with a celery-like dressing of some plant. We lived in ease and luxury and a little necessary grease and dirt. When the fire was stirred, and the spears and paddles were put away for the evening, my host smoked his pipe and told tales of the land of the Tinneh, where all the best furs were and where the mountains were bleak and merciless. His youngest son, a sturdy little fellow of five, shared the pipe with his father, and they passed it from one to the other with amusing solemnity. I told of a

wonderland where the *yahks* were as large as islands and moved against the wind without the help of hands; of great horned animals giving milk; of other great animals on which men rode; of thousands of great stone-houses; of the vast multitude of white people. The Thlinkits received my stories, as they do every statement, with courteous deference. When I rose to go to my own camp the chief selected the handsomest bear-skin from a pile of them, and bade his youngest wife present it to me. When next he came to my camp I gave him, among other things, a fine woollen blanket. He folded it about him and said he would not use it as a hunting blanket. When he went away he would leave it at home, and when he died it should not go with his other effects to his wives and children, but he would be burned in it and it would go with him to the Unknown. A niece of the Chilkáht chief, one of the comeliest of her race, who had married a hideously ugly, but very rich old Hoonáh, the second man in the village, mended my clothes and my sealskin boots, and sang songs or chants for my entertainment that were quite wonderful, I thought, for their flowing measure and rhythm. This is one which I learned to understand the best, called "The Song of the Salmon Fishing":

Why is the young man sorrowful?
Oh why is the young man sad?
Ah-ka. His maiden has left him.
The long suns have come,
The ice now is melting;
Now comes the salmon
He leaps in the river,
In the moon's gentle twilight
He throws up a bow—
A bow of bright silver.
Lusty and strong he darts through the water,
He sports with his mate;
He springs from the water.
All the dark season
He has lain hidden.
Now he comes rushing,
And ripples the river.
Purple and gold, and red and bright silver
Shine on his sides and flash in his sporting,
How he thrashes the net!
How he wrenches the spear!
But the red of his sides
Is stained with a redder;
The maid of the young man leans o'er the salmon
White laugh her teeth,
Clear rings her laughter;
Which passes canoes all busy and happy,
Which outstrips the noise of the many mixed voices
And pierces the heart of her sorrowful lover.
She has forgot him,
She joys with another.
All for another she chases the salmon,
Ah-ka. Your sweetheart has left you.
So do they jeer him,
Ah-ka—your sweetheart is here at the fishing!
Ah-ka—how like you this gay salmon season?

The crabs I saw at this village were wonderful for their size. Two crabs were brought

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to me, the largest of which measured a little more than six feet on a line joining the extremities of its outstretched mandibles. The body was eighteen inches long. When broken in pieces one crab filled a camp kettle, and four men made a hearty meal off it, and it was all very good. The boy archers of the village who brought me the crabs held their bows horizontally, and strained the bow against the front of the thumb and back of the little fingers, the arrow passing between the fore and middle fingers, a mode of archery peculiar to the Alaskans. Many of the men and boys of the village were making boxes and firkins, and shaping bows and paddles. They used dried dog-fish skin for sand-paper.

In this village were many little bee-hive huts, temporarily constructed of mats or bark, which were due to one of the most universal superstitions, and especially cruel, as influencing these people. These huts were the temporary shelter to which women were driven at certain times when they most needed comfort and attention, that is, at the periods of childbirth, etc.

When a maiden reaches a marriageable age her lover demands his bride from her parents, and if they answer favorably he sends the purchase-money or goods, and on the appointed day seats himself outside her hut with his back to the door. If they are willing to accept him he is invited in. The maiden sits modestly in a corner. The relatives form a circle round the fire and sing and dance. The wedding gifts are displayed and critically examined. They are laid upon the floor, and the girl walks over them to her lover. According to the Russian priest, Veniaminoff and Wrangell, the marriage ceremony is not complete until bride and groom have fasted four days, and lived away from each other for a month. They then live together as man and wife. I had no opportunity of confirming the accuracy of these statements.

A man frequently takes the name of his son, but, before doing so, he gives a festival and announces his intention. He does not give up his former name or names, but assumes a new one as the father of his son; or he takes the name of a dead ancestor, but first gives a festival in honor of that departed progenitor. They call such a ceremony "elevating" (or reverencing) the dead. Another festival is of a political character. It is to gain popularity and influence. To this end the ambitious person will save for years till he has an accumulation of this world's goods. Then he makes a feast of unlimited eating

and drinking, and all this store of wealth is distributed to the guests present. Festivals also celebrate the arrival of distinguished guests.

In the gray dawn, as we were about to push from shore, the old chief came to us accompanied by two of his wives. My blanket was wrapped round him. He said I had a good heart. I was a young chief now, but some day I would be a great one. Among the Thlinkits, he said, when a friend was leaving on a long journey, they watched him out of sight, for he might never return. I was his friend. I was going away to my own land. He would never see me again. Therefore he had come to watch me out of sight. He then motioned to his elder wife, who handed me a beautiful sable skin, and he continued: "Wherever you go among Thlinkits, show them this and tell them I gave it to you."

The breeze was freshening. I wrapped my capote about me and stepped aboard. We paddled rapidly out to sea, and it was not long before the three figures were lost to view. We were about three hundred and fifty miles from Sitka. In three days we reached Koutzenóo, a large village opposite the entrance to Peril Strait, where most of the native distilled liquor is made. Here we witnessed a drunken revel of indescribable abandon, during which naked and half-naked men and women dragged themselves about the place.

With a comparatively mild climate throughout the Archipelago, with most valuable ship-building timber covering the islands, with a cedar that now sells at one hundred and fifty dollars a thousand feet in Sitka, with splendid harbors, with inexhaustible fisheries, with an abundance of coal, and the probability that veins of copper, lead, silver, and gold await the prospector, with the possibility of raising sufficient garden vegetables, and with wild cranberry swamps on nearly every island; with all these advantages it is surprising that an industrious, amphibious, ship-building, fishing colony from New England, or other States, has not established itself in Alaska. One drawback is that Congress has not yet organized a territorial government, but when this region shall have been opened up to individual enterprise and settlement, it will then be discovered that Alaska is a valuable possession. There is lacking neither the wealth nor the will to contradict this, but to those who are really interested I will say what the opposition does not say:—Go and see! The round trip from New York will cost you about six hundred dollars, which does not include hotel expenses.

C. E. S. Wood.